

# Boots on the Ground - at NAS Oceana

By Eddie C. Riley, NAVAIR Public Affairs

**B**oots on the Ground at 1300" may sound like an amphibious mission on a foreign soil, but this time it was the designation of an equally precise assault by the brass on barriers which have been holding down the non-deployed readiness of Naval Aviation.

As part of a program to improve readiness, and as the culmination of five weeks of work group effort, the "boots" of a number of admirals recently touched down in Virginia at Naval Air Station Oceana's Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD) for the "Boots on the Ground" (BOG) part of the improvement program.

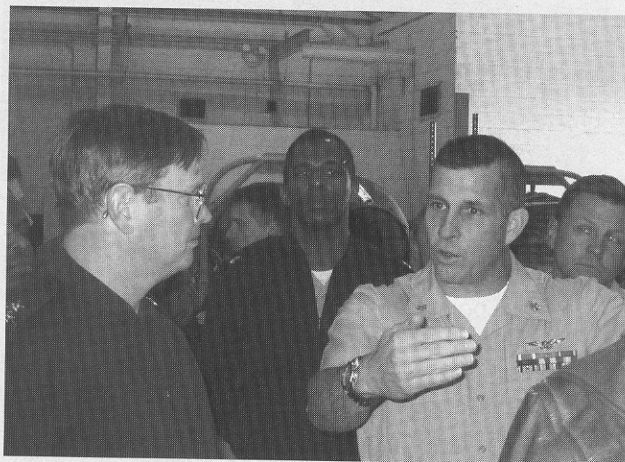
The visit took them to the work areas of five aviation systems where they received first hand accounts of readiness problems from military and civilian maintainers.

The systems reviewed in this BOG included the F/A-18's engine, radar and forward-looking infrared (FLIR) pod; and the F-14's engine and radar. Flag officers attending the BOG included RADM Wally Massenburg, Naval Air Systems Command's Assistant Commander for Logistics; RADM Mike Finley, Commander, Naval Inventory Control Point (where aviation spare parts are managed); RADM Steve Heilman, NAVAIR Assistant Commander for Industrial Operations; and RADM Jake Shuford, Assistant Commander of the Navy Personnel Command for Distribution.

Each of the admirals has a leadership role as a part of the Naval Aviation Readiness Improvement Team (NAVRIT). NAVRIT is a cross-Navy implementation team directing the Naval Aviation Readiness Integrated Improvement Program (NAVRIP), a systemic approach to improving Naval Aviation non-deployed readiness through integrated requirements, supplier and budget solutions. NAVRIP is spearheaded by VADM John Nathman,

COMNAVAIRPAC. NAVRIT also includes members from OPNAV, the Defense Logistics Agency, AIRLANT, AIRPAC and some other units.

"From the deck plate perspective, we've had dozens of people come ask what hurts our heads. They write reports and nothing seems to happen. This is different and I'll stake my reputation on it," said CAPT Mark Clemente, a 22-year Navy veteran, referring to the flag officers presence and support for NAVRIP. CAPT Clemente, Commander, Fighter Wing Atlantic, is the lead wing commander at NAS Oceana. He also oversees aviation



ADCS Paul Beni, AIMD F/A-18 Work Center Supervisor at NAS Oceana explains to RADM Massenburg some of the barriers to aviation readiness discovered during the Boots on the Ground event, held as a part of a cross-Navy program designed to improve aviation readiness between deployments.

maintenance and supply at the station. "This is a golden opportunity because we have leadership lined up," Clemente explained. "I'm extremely excited about this new program and what it will do for us in the future."

At the Oceana AIMD F/A-18 avionics work center, RADM Massenburg asked AT2 Robert Bruce, an aviation electronics technician, if training was adequate. He answered, "No, I'm doing highly intensive OJT (on-the-job training) so it takes them (the technicians) three years to learn what should take one year."

RADM Shuford explained that the NAVRIP process had discovered similar barriers at the EA-6B Wing at NAS Whidbey Island, Washington, the first air wing to conduct a BOG visit. "NAVRIP is a process that you will benefit from as we continue to make changes based on what we find during these BOG visits," RADM Shuford said. He added that the necessary changes would be pursued across Naval Aviation, instead of just at the station where the barriers are discovered.

Next, the group visited the F-14 avionics work center where AT2 Richard Velte told them, "I have one (maintenance)

bench that is down all the time...all the time. I have to take parts off of the common test equipment." RADM Massenburg was able to connect him with Marie Greening, NAVAIR program manager for common aviation support equipment, who was a part of the BOG group. She spoke with Velte about interim and permanent solutions as new equipment replaces the legacy equipment.

The training and support equipment issues mentioned by the technicians and the responses offered by the BOG group members are examples of quick fixes in progress, but all the leaders expressed the importance of recognizing that NAVRIP is a process.

"We have to get the fixes identified and in the POM (budget)," said RADM Heilman, co-leader of the NAVRIT supplier team. "If we do our part, we will benefit our followers. We will see some changes quickly; but most will be visible in the next two to three years."

The BOG process at NAS Oceana is one that will be employed at seven other Naval Aviation facilities during the next 17 months. Naval leadership from the Pentagon to the waterfront endorses NAVRIP to improve Naval Aviation non-deployed readiness. ■